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AUTHOR Fico, Frederick
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ABSTRACT

A study examined how statehouse reporters covering the 1982 session of the Indiana General Assembly used information sources. Specifically, it focused on reporter reliance on key senate leaders, on the visibility of those senators in published stories, and on the institutional images transmitted in stories in which those and other senators were interviewed. The study also investigated why reporters relied on certain sources for their information. Thirty-three reporters from different media were interviewed, and 287 randomly selected stories about the senate session were analyzed. Results indicated that "ultimate spokesmen" were designated by reporters, and that these tended to be the most visible leaders in the senate. Reasons given for using the key leaders included their ability to provide reliable information, offer clear explanations, and be candid. Reporters from different media used sources differently, with wireservice and broadcast reporters exhibiting the greatest reliance on formal institutional activities and on the governor in covering the legislature. Newspaper reporters were less reliant on the governor and more reliant on the senators. They also tended to produce more interview stories. (Author/FL)

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THE "ULTIMATE SPOKESMAN" REVISITED:

THE VISIBILITY OF STATE LAWMAKERS IN THE MASS MEDIA

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

By

Frederick Fico
Assistant Professor
School of Journalism
Michigan State University

A paper presented before the Newspaper Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication at the annual convention Aug. 6-9 at Oregon State University, Corvallis.

CS 207 544

Abstract for: The "Ultimate Spokesman" Revisited: The Visibility of State Lawmakers in the Mass Media

This study examines how statehouse reporters covering the 1982 session of the Indiana General Assembly used state senators as sources of information. It focuses on reporter reliance on key Senate leaders, on the visibility of these senators in published stories, and on the institutional images transmitted in stories in which these and other senators are interviewed. The reasons why reporters rely on certain sources for covering the legislature also are probed.

A survey of legislative reporters and a content analysis of Senate stories are used in this study. Thirty-three reporters from different media were interviewed. The content analysis includes 287 Senate stories randomly selected from the universe of 600 stories collected during the session.

Interview and story findings indicate that "ultimate spokesmen" are designated by reporters. But this need not be a function of constituency size or individual activity as some studies suggest. In this statehouse study, the most visible leaders seem valued for their influence and as representatives of the entire institution in encounters with other social forces. Further, the reasons reporters give for using key leaders include elements emphasizing a mix of journalistic values such as ability to provide reliable information, clear explanation, candidness and conflict.

Reporters from different media were found to use sources differently. Hard-pressed wire service and broadcast reporters exhibited the greatest reliance on formal institutional activities and on the governor in covering the legislature. Newspaper reporters were less reliant on the governor and more reliant on the senators themselves. Newspaper reporters also tended to produce more interview stories. Overall, such interview stories seemed to contain richer images of the legislative process than stories relying on collective activities such as floor or committee action.

The author will send copies of the paper upon request:

Frederick Fico
Assistant Professor
School of Journalism
Communication Arts Building
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Mich. 48824

The visibility of lawmakers in the mass media is obviously crucial not only to their electoral and policy goals, but to the public image of the institution they serve. Reporters through their choices of sources for stories control that visibility and the perspectives that are transmitted to audiences.

This paper examines how statehouse reporters covering the 1982 session of the Indiana General Assembly used state senators as sources of information. In particular, this study focuses on reporter reliance on certain Senate leaders for information, on the visibility of these senators in published stories, and on the institutional images transmitted in stories in which these leaders and other senators are interviewed. The reasons why reporters rely on certain sources for covering the legislature are also probed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The way reporters use governmental sources has been of continuing interest to mass communication researchers.[1] Indeed, this study seeks to replicate and extend the work of several researchers who have reached different conclusions about how the situations of lawmakers influence their visibility in the mass media.

Weaver and Wilhoit used a content analysis to gauge mass media visibility of U.S. Senators in four congresses between 1953 and 1974.[2] They concluded that while Senate leadership position, seniority and state size predicted press attention, the activity of the individual senator was "clearly the dominant predictor of frequency" of AP and news magazine coverage.[3] Indeed, Weaver and Wilhoit suggest that publicity given to very active individual senators may draw attention from those with actual power in the Senate resulting from seniority

and committee position. The reporters the researchers subsequently interviewed seemed to support inferences that senator seniority, committee assignment, activity and individual personality characteristics explained press visibility.

Susan Miller, in another congressional study, explored how prestige determined the extent to which journalists would use a particular source as a spokesman.[4] She found more coverage going to Senate committees than to House committees, and suggested that the key factor in coverage was topics in the news. What she called "spokesmanship" was linked to having special responsibility for such topics through committee assignment, and to the size of the constituency the individual lawmaker represented. For Miller, such "institutional, structural factors" affect a source's media visibility more than individual activity. "The differing 'representativeness' of their districts and the differing 'newsworthiness' of their committee assignments mean that even a representative or senator who actively seeks publicity and attains membership on certain committees will be limited by the nature of his constituency and by topics in the news," Miller asserts.[5]

Intuitively, both these interpretations of news decisionmaking by reporters seem appropriate. Obviously the attention of reporters is drawn by the activity of individual lawmakers. The very idea of "what's new" is embodied in the new proposals, suggestions, statements and votes of public officials. Clearly too, reporters are guided in their news definitions by developments that affect or command the attention of the largest number of people. Those public officials who can affect the lives of many people must be a focus for much of the newsgathering of reporters. Moreover, it is plausible that such considerations influence newsgathering at any governmental

level, and within governmental institutions as well as between them.

But it is also likely that some journalistic factors systematically produce a greater or lesser reliance on the "ultimate spokesman," a term Miller coined to describe the news defining power of the president. Medium type as it relates to work constraints on reporters might be one of those factors. A number of researchers have found that equipment needs and time limitations compel broadcast reporters to rely more than newspaper reporters on authoritative leaders who can be recognized by a broad audience.[6] However, several studies of state legislative reporters failed to turn up evidence that reporters from different media were very different in their news values or in reliance on sources.[7] These studies were based on participant observation and interviews with reporters, and did not analyze actual news outputs.

A content analysis of the reporting of the Indiana House of Representative in 1981 did find differences in the stories of wire service reporters, newspaper statehouse bureau reporters, and newspaper reporters who covered the legislative session from their local communities.[8] Wire service reporters showed the greatest reliance on legislative activities, bills and leaders, while local reporters relied on interviews with home district representatives. Newspaper statehouse bureau reporters assigned to the Capitol fulltime showed the greatest source diversity in their published reports. They relied on a mix of floor and committee activities, on bills, and on interviews with legislative leaders, home district representatives and rank and file legislators.

This finding should not be surprising. Wire service reporters who write a lot of stories under tight deadlines must find sources who are authoritative, reliable and responsible. Local reporters

who cannot often get to the statehouse are dependent on second-hand accounts of area representatives. Newspaper statehouse bureau reporters have neither the production pressures of wire service reporters nor the geographic constraints of local reporters.

However, the 1981 House study did not attempt to interview reporters to check these assumptions or to probe their reasons for using sources. Further, only a few of the newspaper statehouse bureau and local reporters, and no broadcast reporters, were included. These gaps are filled by the present study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Several research questions raised by the reviewed literature can be addressed with data collected for this study.

1. Are any "ultimate spokesmen" in the Indiana Senate relied upon by reporters?

Miller suggests a heirarchy of ultimate spokesmen, with the president as the top spokesman able to define news merely through his public pronouncements. Because U.S. senators are fewer in number than representatives, and speak for larger constituencies, they are the next most useful spokesmen.

This state-level study will thus probe self-admitted reliance by reporters on the governor's press conference activity as well as on senators. Further, while Miller explored the kinds of conditions likely to lead to the overall conferral of "spokesmanship" by reporters, she did not examine this process as it affected individual lawmakers within an institution. Finally, differences in the conferral of spokesmanship by newspaper statehouse bureau reporters, local newspaper reporters, wire service reporters and broadcast reporters will be explored.

2. If such ultimate spokesmen exist, what reasons do reporters give for relying on them?

Weaver and Wilhoit suggest that the activity of the individual U.S. senators was the best predictor of coverage. Miller argues that institutional and structural factors such as size of constituency or news topic expertise are crucial.

Within a particular state legislature, all lawmakers represent constituencies of approximately equal size. But even given this "control," it may still be possible for some lawmakers to be more "representative" than others, particularly when the legislature as a whole is being buffeted by other institutions. Consequently, this study examines a number of potential reporter motives for using ultimate spokesmen. These include "activity" reasons, such as lawmaker ability to provide stories when the reporter wants, exciting political material, or news about new proposals. "Institutional" reasons are also examined, including senator ability to provide reliable information, explanations of legislative procedures, and help in finding sources to back stories.

3. What is the actual visibility of ultimate spokesmen in published stories compared to other senators?

Weaver and Wilhoit examined senator mentions in the news media, but did not explore in more detail the stories in which they appeared. Miller focused on gross differences in the coverage of U.S. Senate and House Committees. This study examines published reports to gauge differences in the mentions of and interviews with ultimate spokesmen and other senators. Further, it is possible to compare actual source citation in stories with the reporters' self-estimates of reliance.

4. What are the principal images of the activities of the legislative institution in which ultimate spokesmen and other political actors are interviewed?

A story analysis makes it possible to relate reporter reliance on certain senators with institutional images in the stories in which those sources are used. More broadly, it is possible to compare the picture of legislative activity that is transmitted in reports involving different interview sources with reports that rely totally on Senate action or analysis of bills.

METHODOLOGY

This study interrelates a survey of legislative reporters and a content analysis of stories written about the Senate during the 1982 session of the Indiana General Assembly. Thirty-three reporters who covered the session responded. This includes 13 of 14 statehouse bureau newspapers reporters, all four wire service reporters in the statehouse, eight of 10 broadcast reporters operating out of the Capitol, and eight of 12 reporters from outstate newspapers who cover the session from their newsrooms.[9]

The content analysis includes 287 stories about the Senate or senators randomly selected from a universe of 600 Senate stories collected during the 30 day session.[10] This includes 111 stories from statehouse bureau newspaper reporters, 118 from wire service reporters, and 58 from local reporters. It was not possible to content analyze television or radio reports on the legislature.

Reporters were asked to gauge on a seven-point scale their reliance on a number of sources in covering the Senate.[11] These sources included documents such as bills and reports, activities such as floor votes and committee meetings, different types of senators such as leaders or committee chairmen, and non-legislative

sources such as lobbyists and agency experts.

Reporters were then asked to identify three senators who were "most useful" for covering the Senate.[12] In an open-ended question, the reporters were asked to explain briefly the nature of this usefulness.[13] Each named senator was then ranked on 12 reasons why he or she was important in covering the Senate.[14] Such reasons included providing stories when wanted or needed, getting information on legislative procedures, and accessibility.

Stories were coded to analyze how frequently different senators were mentioned and the kinds of sources used in stories. Such sources included floor and committee action, bills, and interviews with leaders and other senators.[15] Finally, stories in which interviews were manifest were analyzed to gauge the principal image of the Senate transmitted.[16] Such images included legislative procedures as bills wound their way through the lawmaking process, legislative debate over the substantive merits of proposed legislation, and the Senate as an institution in a context with other social forces or institutions.

FINDINGS

Reporters Reliance Findings

Reporters indicated that they rely extensively on three Senate leaders and one committee chairman. A total of 26 of the 50 Indiana state senators were identified by the 33 reporters as "most useful" sources. But the four senators -- Republican Robert Garton of Columbus, president pro tempore of the Senate; Republican Lawrence Borst of Indianapolis, chairman of the powerful Senate Finance commitee; Democrat Frank O'Bannon of Corydon, Senate minority leader; and Democrat Louis Mahern of Indianapolis, assistant minority leader --

got 56 percent of the first mentions, 53 percent of the second mentions, and 34 percent of the third mentions. Senators Garton and Borst alone accounted for 53 percent of the first mentions given to 13 different senators, while Senators O'Bannon and Mahern alone accounted for 38 percent of the second mentions given to 16 senators. This concentration is especially dramatic considering that in all 13 senators occupy formal party or legislative leadership positions, and that more than 25 committee chairmanship positions exist in the Senate.

Further, this concentration varies only somewhat when reporters from different media are examined, even though broadcast and wire service reporters report filing twice as many stories per day as do the statehouse and local newspaper reporters. For the newspaper statehouse bureau reporters, the four senators got 70 percent of the first mentions, 62 percent of the second mentions, and 54 percent of the third mentions. The four senators got all the first mentions of wire service reporters, three quarters of the second mentions, and a quarter of the third mentions. Broadcast reporters were somewhat less reliant, with the four senators making up about two-thirds of the first and second mentions, and about 40 percent of the third mentions. Not surprisingly, local newspaper reporters relied least upon these four leaders, who made up about 14 percent of their second mentions.

Most Indiana legislative reporters, then, seem to recognize the source value of these four Senate leaders. But geographic location, rather than medium type, seems to be the major factor affecting this reliance. Newspaper, wire service and broadcast reporters who worked in the statehouse during the session were very reliant on the four senators, while local reporters turned to sources closer to home.

Weaver and Wilhoit suggest that the activity of the individual senator is a strong predictor of coverage. But when reporters are examined on their "very important" reasons for using Senators Garton, Borst, O'Bannon and Mahern, findings suggest that "institutional" reasons are more commonly of top importance than are activity ones.

For newspaper statehouse bureau reporters, the ability of the four senators to explain legislative procedures, followed by their accessibility and knowledge of the workings of proposals, are most often the top reasons given. (See Table I) Getting exciting political information -- an activity reason -- and getting reliable information -- an institutional one -- are the next most common reasons for finding these senator sources useful.

However, in more open-ended comments reporters indicate that they also are sensitive to the "activity" aspects of these leaders. Senators Garton and Borst were both frequently referred to as "movers and shakers" who influenced legislation. Indeed, Senator Borst was called the "governor in absentia" and the "man who makes the decisions." And comments about minority Democrats brings out more clearly the journalistic concern for candidness and color. One reporter was typical in referring to Senator O'Bannon as "so damned honest," while Senator Mahern was widely perceived as "politically astute" and "incredibly quotable."

Wire service reporters differ somewhat from newspaper statehouse bureau reporters in their reasons for going to leaders. Getting reliable information was the most common reason for finding the four senators useful, with accessibility the second most common reason. These two qualities seem consonent with wire service work requirements reflecting the need for fast and accurate information. Interestingly,

getting information on the local impact of legislation was the third most common reason given by wire service reporters for going to these four senators.

The more extensive comments of the wire service reporters, however, resemble those of the newspaper statehouse bureau reporters. Senator Garton was turned to because of his influence, while Senator Borst was considered the financial expert whom one "had to use." The Democratic leaders were looked to for the "straight stuff," with Senator O'Bannon almost universally trusted. As one wire service reporter asserted, "I can't imagine Frank ever telling a lie."

For broadcast reporters, a somewhat greater emphasis is given to activity reasons for going to these senators, although institutional reasons remain important too. Getting information on the workings of proposals was most frequently considered a very important reason for going to the leaders, followed by their ability to explain legislative procedures. However, getting stories when wanted or needed shared third place with getting reliable information for broadcast reporters. And in broadcast reporters' more open-ended comments, the power of leaders and their ability to generate conflict seemed more important than for newspaper and wire service reporters. Senator Borst was referred to by one broadcast reporter as "knowledgeable about most controversial budget bills," while another said that the "very opinionated" Senator Mahern was a "good source of conflict."

Overall, then, these senators were most frequently turned to by reporters for their knowledge of the institutional and legislative process, with broadcast reporters giving somewhat greater emphasis to activity reasons than do their print colleagues. Still, reporters

from all media seem at least sensitive to the activity value of these senators.

But reporter perception of the usefulness of senators for legislative information seems to follow mostly from different lawmaker situations within the institution. Senator Garton's salience seems to emerge from his formal institutional power and leadership. Senator Borst is the valued financial expert, whose power, while great, is circumscribed by his committee specialization. Senator O'Bannon is looked to for his honesty and candor, as well as for his spokesmanship for the minority party point of view. Senator Mahern obtains press attention in part because of his political policy stands and in part because of his power with words, a quality of special interest to reporters.

An examination of reporter self-estimates of reliance on a variety of sources further illuminates these findings. For the local newspaper reporters, home district representatives were relied upon most, followed by Senate action and other rank and file senators. (See Table II) Broadcast reporters relied almost equally on Senate action, the governor's press conferences and committee meetings. Newspaper statehouse bureau reporters and wire service reporters were more similar. Both ranked Senate action first. However, wire service reporters also gave the top ranking to the governor's press conferences and to bills, followed by committee meetings and Senate leaders. Senate leaders were ranked second by newspaper statehouse bureau reporters, and committee meetings were their third-ranked source.

Miller's research suggests that the chief executive should get relatively more attention than members of the legislature since that chief executive speaks to the broadest constituency. Here

medium type does show its impact, with broadcast and wire service reporters giving the governor's press conferences first or second place rankings above any senator type. For the newspaper statehouse bureau reporters, however, six other sources, including most types of senators, obtained higher reliance rankings. For the local newspaper reporters, the governor's press conferences were hardly relied upon at all.

Story Findings

It is still necessary, however, to explore how "topics in the news" related to the use of these senators in stories, and in particular to the conferral of "spokesmanship." How are the senators that reporters find "most useful" for legislative information dealt with in Senate stories?

Taxes and school funding were especially important issues for Indiana lawmakers during the 1982 session.[17] The state budget was projected to go into the red unless action was taken. New business taxes and tax collection speedups were being pushed by Senate Republicans. But tax increases were opposed by Republicans controlling the House of Representatives. Further, the school funding formula, an issue that in 1981 had resulted in a special legislative session, had to be resolved in 1982. Against the opposition of education interest groups and minority Democrats, Senate Republicans wanted to hold the education spending line, while House members favored some increase in state aid to education.

These topics, predating the 1982 session and dominating much of its activity, were bound to focus journalistic attention on those senators who had to deal with other institutions and make decisions about the state's financial course. These topics alone were the

principal subjects of about 15 percent of the stories coded during the 1982 session. This is a considerable concentration of journalistic attention considering that some 900 bills were introduced. The two topics also were of continuing interest right up to the end of the session, when a House-Senate compromise resulted both in higher business taxes and some additional money for the schools.

Consistent with reporter designations of "most useful" senators, Senators Garton and Borst were the most frequently mentioned senators in stories. Newspaper statehouse bureau and wire service reporters were almost identical in these mentions, with the two senators getting about 20 percent of their first story mentions. Not quite 10 percent of their second mentions went to all four senators combined. Local reporters gave the four senators 16 percent of their first mentions, and four percent of their second mentions. However, virtually every other state senator also was mentioned during the session, although less frequently overall than the four Senate leaders.

Analysis of the newspaper statehouse bureau and wire service stories indicates more of an interview concentration on the four senators. Legislative leaders were interviewed in 13 percent of the newspaper statehouse bureau stories and in 18 percent of the wire service stories. Senators Garton, O'Bannon and Mahern were the leaders interviewed in three-quarters of these stories. Committee chairmen were interviewed in 16 percent of the newspaper statehouse bureau stories, and in 8 percent of the wire service stories. Senator Borst alone was the interviewed senator in half those newspaper statehouse bureau stories, and in three-quarters of the wire service stories.

Few individual senators received this kind of interview attention. About 12 percent of the newspaper statehouse bureau stories involved interviews with home district senators, but these interviews were divided up among 10 different senators. About 15 percent of the wire service stories involved interviews with rank and file senators, but these interviews were divided up among 14 different senators.

Overall, then, source citation in stories focused on a very few Senate leaders and committee chairmen. Mentions and interviews with other senators were by no means absent, but coverage obtained by the four Senate leaders was by any standard disproportionate. It should be noted, however, that fewer than half the stories analyzed involved any interview at all. These stories tended to emphasize "objective" events such as floor action, committee action and printed bills. About 45 percent of these stories were written by wire service reporters, and 37 percent by newspaper statehouse bureau reporters.

This concentration of stories on objective events and on interviews with certain key senators seems to influence the kind of image of Senate activity transmitted in stories. In particular, richer images of the legislative process seem to be conveyed in interview stories featuring different legislative and societal actors. (See Table III) Indeed, "spokesmanship" does seem to be conferred on leaders who are interviewed. A third of the leader interview stories portray the Senate in a collective, institutional context in which these senators represent the body in encounters with other social or governmental forces. Another 20 percent of the leader interview stories use both the institution and procedures portrayals as decisions were made on controversial issues such as school aid and tax increases.

Committee chairman interviews, on the other hand, seem more

"introspective," usually focusing on legislative procedures and to a lesser extent on debate. Interview stories with rank and file senators tended to emphasize this procedures context, the institution context, or gave no overall Senate portrayal at all. Interviews with home district senators about equally emphasized the institution, procedures and debate portrayals. Non-legislative interview stories emphasized the institution and debate themes, thus mirroring the leader interview stories.

Those stories lacking any interviews -- about 60 percent of the total -- conveyed mostly objective accounts of legislative activity that could have been obtained by any visitor to the public galleries or committee rooms. The procedures context was used in nearly half these stories, and the debate portrayal in another 20 percent.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Reporters indicate a considerable reliance on a very few institutional leaders in obtaining legislative information, and this concentration further narrows in stories to such leaders and objective institutional activities.

Separate studies by Weaver and Wilhoit and by Miller have both received some replication and qualification in this research. Reporters indicate that the governor's pronouncements are relied upon extensively for covering legislative activities. But this reliance tends to vary with medium. The wire service and broadcast reporters, with the greatest technical and time constraints, show the greatest reliance on formal institutional activities and or the governor. Newspaper reporters are somewhat less reliant on the governor and more reliant on the senators themselves rather than on institutional activities.

Reporter information on their source searching and a story

content analysis indicate that "ultimate spokesmen" are designated by reporters. But this need not be a function of constituency size. In this statehouse study, the most visible leaders seem valued as representatives of the entire institution in encounters with other social forces. Further, the reasons reporters give for using these leaders include elements emphasizing particular journalistic values, such as their ability to provide reliable information and clear explanation. The reporters also seem aware of the power and at least the potential activity of these leaders to affect substantive legislative outcomes.

Given the variety of leaders, committee chairmen, and ordinary lawmakers that reporters could choose from, the four who received the most journalistic attention and visibility during the 1982 session may well concentrate an optimum "mix" of qualities. They "represent" a constituency of legislators, and importantly influence outcomes affecting the people of the state as a whole. They possess the institutional and subject matter expertise to interpret legislative developments for reporters. Even more, they are accessible, candid, colorful and controversial. The analytical models Weaver and Wilhoit and Miller constructed to explain source visibility are both appropriate. The reporters in this study seem to apply both these models in practice in their source searching and story writing.

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2. David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, "News Media Coverage of U.S. Senators in Four Congresses, 1953-1974," Journalism Monographs, No. 67, April 1980.

3. Ibid., p. 18.

4. Susan H. Miller, "News Coverage of Congress: The Search for the Ultimate Spokesman," Journalism Quarterly, Autumn 1977, pp. 459-465.

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7. See Delmer Dunn, Public Officials and the Press (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1969); Carol Hilton and Peter Clarke, "Reporting the Legislature: A Study of Newsmen and Their Sources" (Unpublished Paper, University of Washington, 1966); and Hillard Torgerson, "The Correlates of Reporter Performance and Influences: A Study of 1971 Iowa Legislative Reporters (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Iowa State University, 1974).

8. Frederick Fico, "Reporters and Legislators: An Interaction Theory Approach" Paper presented to the Theory and Methodology Division of the Association for Education in Journalism, annual convention at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, July 1982.

9. Only one reporter -- a statehouse newspaper veteran -- declined to talk at all about his sources, and thus most of his responses were unusuable for this study.

10. A "Senate story" was considered to be any story that made any substantive reference at all to the entire Senate or to any individual senator. In practice, this meant that any story that had at least three to five lines about the Senate or senators.

11. The question was introduced with the following statement: "Reporters can use a number of sources in covering the legislature. We'd like now to get some idea of what sources are most useful and what sources are least useful in covering the legislature." Reporters were then asked to rank on a seven-point scale a number of sources "which may be of use in reporting the Indiana Senate." A 1 meant "not at all" useful, and a 7 meant "very useful."

The following print sources were probed: Senate journals; interim committee reports; committee minutes; printed or draft bills; formal statutes; copies of floor speeches; prepared news releases; handouts from legislators; your morgue or reference file; handouts from lobbyists; stories from other reporters.

The following activity sources were probed: actions on the Senate floor; Senate committee meetings; press conferences of senators; the governor's press conferences.

The following personal sources were probed: caucus or legislative leaders; committee chairmen; ranking minority members of committees; senators known to advocate particular policies or programs; senators seeking reelection; rank and file legislators; senators from your home district; legislative staff; lobbyists; fellow legislative reporters; governor's office; experts in executive departments or agencies.

12. Reporters were asked: "Thinking about the senators you might talk to during the legislative session, who are the ones you've found most useful for stories?"

Reporters were assured of confidentiality in answering this question, and the overwhelming majority indicated that naming their "most useful" senator source was no problem. Two reporters did decline to name a "confidential" senator source, but they did name others.

13. Reporters were asked: "What are the kinds of qualities that make each of these senators a good source of information for you about what's going on in the Senate?"

14. This question was introduced with the following statement: "Here is a list of some reasons that may make a particular senator a good news source. Would you please rank each of the senators you've mentioned on a five-point scale, where a 1 indicates that the reason is not at all important for going to that source, and a 5 indicates that the reason is very important." Reasons probed are as follows:

a. Can usually provide stories when you want
b. Can tell you in detail how proposals, bills or programs actually work

c. Provides exciting political or partisan statements
d. Provides especially accurate, reliable information about government
e. Issues press releases or holds press conferences you can use
f. Is a good source of stories about new and different proposals
g. Can interpret how legislative action may affect your news organization's community
h. Is a good source for exclusives
i. Is accessible for interviews or questions
j. Can explain legislative procedures especially well
k. Provides interesting or exciting material for stories
l. Can help you find other information sources to improve or back stories

Items a, c, e, f, h, and k seem to possess the strongest "activity" components that may be salient to reporters.

15. The following sources were coded for stories: floor action; committee action; press conferences; leader interview; committee chairman interview; rank and file senator interview; home district senator interview; non-legislative source interview; printed bills; reports; other documents; news releases; media reports; and books.

16. Stories were coded to gauge the impression they gave of the Senate as a whole. Categories coded were:

a. No overall portrayal
b. Procedures: traces bill progress, passage, defeat
c. Institution: portrays Senate in its collective context, as a branch of government vis a vis other branches, institutions, etc.
d. Partisan: portrays the Senate as a battleground of Republicans and Democrats and of party politics
e. Combinations of b, c, and d
f. Debate: portrays senators giving substantive opinions and comments about issues or bills
g. Combination of b and f

An Intra-coder reliability test on 15 items for the story portrayals of the Senate produced a Scott's Pi of .65.

17. For a more complete description and analysis of news coverage during the 1982 session, see: the author's , "News Coverage of the Indiana State Senate: An Interaction Theory Approach" (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 1982) Chapter Six.

Table I: The four top reasons most commonly considered "very important" for using a named senator by reporters of different media
(Percent of mentions of Senators Garton, Borst, O'Bannon and Mahern)

	Newspaper Statehouse (N = 13)	Wire Service (N = 4)	Broadcast (N = 8)
Can usually provide stories when you want*		8%	11%
Can tell you in detail how proposals, bills or programs actually work	14%		19
Provides exciting political or partisan statements*	10		8
Provides especially accurate, reliable information about government	10	20	11
Issues press releases or holds press conferences you can use*		8	
Can interpret how legislative action may affect your news organization's community		11	
Is accessible for interviews or questions	20	16	
Can explain legislative procedures especially well	21	8	14
Provides interesting or exciting material for stories*		8	
Total Mentions	(M = 71)	(M = 37)	(M = 36)

* Indicates "activity" reason

Table I: Top three sources relied upon by reporters of different media, where 1 indicates a mean ranking of little or no reliance, and 7 indicates a mean ranking of extensive reliance on the source. (Standard deviation below mean in parentheses)

	Newspaper Statehouse (N = 13)	Local Newspaper (N = 8)	Wire Service (N = 4)	Broadcast (N = 8)
Bills	5.8 (1.1)		7.0 (-)	
Senate Action	6.4 (.76)	5.7 (.95)	7.0 (-)	6.1 (1.6)
Governor Press Conferences			7.0 (-)	6.0 (1.6)
Senate Leaders	6.0 (.58)		6.5 (1.0)	
Rank & File Senators		5.4 (1.5)		
Home District Senators		6.2 (.52)		
Committee Meetings	5.8 (1.2)		6.8 (.50)	5.9 (1.6)

TABLE III

Contexts Used to Describe the Senate
in Stories in Which Interviews are Manifest
(Percent of All Stories)

	Interview and Non-Interview Stories					
Contexts	Leader Interview (N=40)	Chairman Interview (N=29)	Rank & File Interview (N=31)	Home District Interview (N=28)	Non-Legis. Interview (N=29)	No Interview (N=172)
Procedures	13%	41%	36%	21%	17%	45%
Institution	30	10	20	21	31	6
Partisan	10	0	7	11	10	2
Procedures and Institution	23	14	10	14	0	9
Procedures and Partisan	5	7	3	0	4	5
Institution and Partisan	0	3	0	4	4	1
Procedures, Institution and Partisan	0	0	3	0	0	1
Debate	13	21	10	29	24	23
Procedures and Debate	0	3	0	0	0	2
None	8	0	13	0	10	7